



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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whose love for her father was above question, remarked to a friend, "Daddy has to punish us sometimes, you know, 'cos if he didn't we might grow up naughty."

Above all let us be mindful that the relation in which we stand to our children is that in which we ourselves stand before the "All-Father." That He is just but merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. Let us remember that there are occasions when justice should be tempered with mercy, and that the same forgiveness should be extended to the penitent as we hope to obtain.

Finally, let me supplement these few and imperfect remarks of my own with a short poem of Coventry Patmore's, which aptly phrases the dual condition of fatherhood and childhood in which we mortals find ourselves. It is entitled "The Toys":—

"My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my law the seventh time disobeyed,
I struck him, and dismiss'd
With hard words and unkiss'd,
His mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darkened eyelids, and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with blue-bells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I pray'd
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood
Thy great commanded good,
Then, Fatherly not less
Than I, whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'"

J. W. B.

FACILITIES OF MODERN PIANO TEACHING.

BY MISS ELSA ASHBEE.

OF all the arts, music has taken the longest to develop, and music is still in its infancy. It is only during the last 500 years that music has been making real progress, progress which has advanced with a constant acceleration. It is the most universal and complicated of the arts, and through its subtlety speaks a language of the human soul which neither poetry nor the plastic arts can ever reach.

A really fine player has had an education which develops mental qualities far more than most educations, for his success, even when he has the musical mind, is impossible without enormous concentration, intelligence and will power, continual care of detail, endless patience, and a fine physique. What a gigantic field for the teacher to work on to ensure his pupil's success. It is obvious, therefore, that musical education must begin very young and that the teacher must have an adequate grasp of the psychology of the child mind.

In striving for an ideal piano performance, what is it that we really aim at? Soul, touch, facility, accuracy, are perhaps the most salient features and in the order in which they strike us. *Soul* comprises comprehension of the composer's meaning in its very fullest sense. *Touch* the sympathetic expression of his ideas. *Facility* and *accuracy* the mechanical conveyance of them to the audience.

The principles on which I teach technique I can classify under two heads, namely, "make haste slowly," and never leave a difficulty till it has become so easy as to be second nature.

The mental attributes developed by a musical education, as I stated above, are concentration, intelligence, will power, continual care of detail, patience, and a fine physique.

Now which of these, and how, is technique going to develop them?

My conception of technique is very wide ; I hold it to be the process which drives the vehicle conveying the sound. Technique I subdivide into two heads :—the technical exercise and the study, and I will now treat of how to acquire correct results with these separately.

In the beginning stage, which comprises the wrongly taught adult as well as the young untaught child, I hold that most of the technical exercises should be done quite away from the piano. I advocate a special muscular drill not only of the hands but of the entire body, with the will power directed towards the particular muscles under consideration for the moment. Certain breathing exercises are also essential, not only to the acquiring of a fine physique, but also towards checking any tendency towards nervousness. I would like to call your attention to both these facts. You have never yet seen a really fine performer with round shoulders, and you may take it on trust from me that nine cases out of ten are cured of nervousness when correct breathing habits under special mental and physical difficulties have been established ; provided, of course, that they are completely master of the composition they are attempting.

Deep breathing is an essential feature of most of these exercises. If at the outset proper attention is given to these things, rounded backs, stooping shoulders and narrow chests, which lessen the vitality and mar the appearance of many piano students, will be avoided. Whatever tends to weaken a player's vitality is sure to lessen his power and impoverish the quality of his tone. All the exercises are constructed on broad scientific principles.

A muscle develops most rapidly and efficiently when it receives the fullest blood supply of which it is capable ; this maximum blood supply can only be given by the complete extension and contraction of the muscle in question. I have heard people wonder why a certain pupil has made so little progress, although he has been steadily playing some great master's technical exercises for some hours per day for months, or that the Gradus or Czerny have apparently reaped no result ; it is simply because this principle has been neglected. Czerny, Clementi, etc., were constructed to acquire technique and they work wonders in a short time, when the idea of

maximum blood supply is attended to in the right way. This way gives the pupil courage, and obviates the nerve wear and tear which grinding away at one particular study for hours per week necessitates. The weak fourth finger is made obedient and as useful as the others and a small stretch can be very considerably enlarged. The youngest beginner can do these exercises ; they develop besides the muscle to be strengthened, will power, concentration, and patience. They develop these things unconsciously and by such easy steps that the brain and nerves are not fatigued. That is the only "royal road."

The next thing in technical exercises is a step nearer to the piano, for the above gymnastics being founded on broad principles will help for any instruments. But we must now narrow the horizon, and we are going to approach the first requisite of piano playing, namely, independence of fingers. This is also best done away from the keyboard. A table of ordinary height is all that is necessary, and with this so much can be done without confusing the mind with notes, that facility and independence, while absolutely correct playing movements are all the time being studied, are so safely learnt that by the time the pupil is taken to the keyboard hand formation and finger movements are so habitual that they practically are second nature. The finger action will be so natural that the whole series of movements necessary for carrying it out follow each other spontaneously at the command of one effort of will, *i.e.*, actions which are artificial have been practised in connection with ideas which are familiar, the new ideas which even the simplest five-finger exercise on the piano present can now be learned by means of actions which are natural. One of the chief things that is studied in connection with these exercises at a table, is complete suppleness. When a difficulty either mental or physical is encountered, the human being naturally holds his breath and stiffens his muscles. This can be most frequently seen when the pupil is reading at sight, the suppleness he may or may not have at his command when playing what is familiar to him, in most cases leaves him when a sight reading difficulty is presented. By these exercises complete relaxation is studied and also such control of the muscles that when, as in

some classes of execution, a certain amount of rigidity is required it can be called up instantly and left instantly.

For young beginners then four branches of the work have to be inculcated simultaneously, namely, ear-training, finger-training, eye-training (for sight reading and sight playing), and time-training. These all form some branch or other of technique according to the conception of this term named above, and they must be all more or less attended to before the second part of the technical course, namely, the study, is to be attacked.

Now to pass on to elementary ear-training, which is quite within the grasp of very young people. It is an excellent plan to make children sing the notes as they say their names, but of course this presupposes that the child has a naturally good ear; with backward ones it is best to commence with a more indirect method, to explain that the sounds at what we call the top of the keyboard are called high sounds, and at the bottom of the keyboard low sounds. Then to play one after another two separate and rather far apart tones and ask the child which is the higher and gradually diminish the interval. This method may seem too circuitous, but children whose ears are naturally dull have some little difficulty at first in distinguishing when the interval between the sounds becomes small. I would like to add here, that in my experience I have proved it to be quite wrong that children who have a bad ear when, say, five or six are put down as unmusical. We must always bear in mind that no two human beings develop in the same way, and that because A's ear is infinitely superior to B's, when they are five and six, it by no means follows that this difference will persist when both are grown up. I know, to quote an example, a young man, now nineteen, who between the ages of five and nine was unable to get nearer than, as a rule, five notes to a sound he was asked to sing; he has now got absolute pitch to such a marked degree, that he can tell, when only once struck within his hearing, the notes of any combination of chords or discords even quite low down on the keyboard, and of course has no difficulty, therefore, in reproducing any music from ear, even when once heard only. When children have got quick at the ear exercises I mentioned above, it is time to ask them to distinguish between a note which is out of tune from one

that is not (every teacher must insist that the piano of each pupil is kept strictly in tune), and to ask the pupil to sing the notes by their names, confining him to only quite a few to start with. In many cases after a few weeks' exercise on this plan, pupils will be able to distinguish the few notes thus learned from others as they are casually struck. The distinction between tones and semitones can now be learnt, and a simple exercise invented in which the pupil is to say whether any note from its predecessor is a tone or a semitone. When this is easily done, the other intervals commonly used and the sounds of the various scales major and minor can be learned.

After this and sometimes before the pupil has got to the piano and afterwards always simultaneously with his playing lessons, differences of touch should be taught by ear, particularly the true legato, *i.e.*, not overlapping or staccato.

This gets the pupil accustomed to desire a variety in touch and to strive for differences in his own subsequent efforts at the keyboard. Another point to be considered in ear development is a most careful choice of pieces and studies after the stage when only the same notes are played with both hands. Some harmonies in which discords are practically only passing notes, are most unpleasant to the ear when slowly practised and more to a child's ear than to the adult, who is accustomed to understanding discords; a child plays or spells out, one might say, quite slowly. Tunes written on an Alberti bass often err very considerably in this particular, and the teacher must use great discretion so as not to vitiate the child's ear for concord.

The eye-training can be done very rapidly and easily by a new method, in analogy with the new modern language method, namely, the system of French and German without tears, and I would call this music without tears, as it is nothing more nor less than a game, teaching the hitherto distasteful task of acquiring a knowledge of musical notation by a most simple device.

The time-training seems at first sight a simple enough matter, but really it requires great skill on the teacher's part to so inculcate it into an ungifted pupil, as to render him quite, shall I say, *safe*. The feeling of time and with

it rhythm is so inborn in some people and so early developed in others that it requires but very little training, but the strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link, and it is, as in all education, towards the less able that the teacher's chief efforts must be directed. To be a good timeist, one must *think time* and *feel time*; and to help young people towards this goal, it is an excellent plan to make them beat time, first of all of course, for things they know quite well. When this can be readily done, the different time signatures distinguished and the strong and weak accents in each bar noticed, the pupil should be questioned on hearing a few bars of some unknown music, in what measure it is written, and then to beat the measure as the playing continues. When the pupil is a little more advanced, simple duets as one of his playing exercises are most efficacious for developing a sense of time-feeling. Under this heading practically comes rhythm too, but of course, I think you will agree with me, that the sense of rhythm is born and not made; it can to a certain extent be cultivated a little, but during these early years of instruction (not always of age, I would add), the best plan is to let the pupil hear the best performers, never to hear anything wrong either from the point of view of time or notes, and to have great care as to the choice of pieces. From the outlook of developing rhythm, it is essential never to give a pupil anything beyond his technical skill, so that his whole energy may be directed in interpreting the composition, whatever it is (piece or study), according to the then development of his powers. This point I would like particularly to dwell on as one of the necessary principles of rapid improvement musically. The stages of development, particularly on the interpretative plane, should be so gradual that the pupil hardly notices the increasing difficulties. A contrary plan so often engenders an utter want of finish, which is so detrimental to artistic performance. Early training is very necessary on this point: a piece or study should never be left till it is as finished as the pupil can make it. It should be memorised, played frequently, and not put aside till quite complete. You may say, "But pupils get tired of their pieces." I would reply, not if they are within the range of their *technical* skill, and if they are taught from

an early age how to practise economically, as regards time and nerve energy. Remember, technical difficulties have been mastered mostly away from any sound, the nerves have been much saved in this particular, it is only the interpretation and phrasing to be studied now.

The imaginary pupil whose musical education we have so far been following, has now got to the stage when the various branches of technique that he has been studying can be more or less combined at the piano. He is now in a position to commence studying more advanced technique, namely, scale playing and chord playing, but all new movements which are now called into action must like the original ones be first studied away from the keyboard. I cannot too strongly impress on you the saving of time and patience this engenders and also nerve force, to make the pupil thoroughly understand at a table the exact difficulties involved, and how to overcome them every time a new branch of technique occurs, and therefore a new branch of playing movement in his career.

Too early scale playing is baneful to subsequent development. As I have said before, the scale is a very composite piece of performance, and till the pupil has acquired certain of his playing habits as a second nature it is quite contrary to recognised educational principles to attempt to make him take in new ones. To play a scale correctly seventeen points must be noticed simultaneously. To demonstrate these would be practically giving you a lesson on scale playing, which is of course not possible or desired in a lecture of the kind I am giving. I can only say that these seventeen points have in various ways nearly all been covered by the exercises preceding scale-study in the present scheme, so that the pupil is only asked to combine already acquired principles.

Arpeggios are studied on the same lines, but I personally hold that, for a time, it is better for a beginner to have a little systematic study of broken chord passages before the real arpeggio is worked at.

The pupil has now probably arrived at the stage when special attention can be directed to tone formation. In his early stages lightness, suppleness, and therefore independence are chiefly to be considered. With young,

weak hands it is obviously an unreasonable demand to require a big tone. In fact, tone, like voice production, if not most carefully taught and supervised has the same baneful result. By wrong voice production the organ may be permanently injured, and similarly in piano teaching a wrong method of tone production may have the effect of rendering a touch hard and unsympathetic. Some people have a natural touch, these I am hardly at present considering; the volume and clearness of this touch can be improved of course, but I am chiefly concerned with the quite average student, who after all is very largely in the majority, and for these certain well-directed and carefully planned exercises work wonders in the quality of the touch, in endurance and in brilliancy. Studies and pieces calling for the different varieties of touch are most necessary to show how to apply the exercises which have been previously practised. Varieties in touch are almost numberless, but they can broadly be divided into two classes, the *staccato class*, staccato from finger or wrist or arm, which is the smaller class, and the *legato class*, which includes passage playing, accompaniment playing and the true cantabile, and combination of these. The true cantabile, Thalberg described as being performed by *la main désossée*, i.e., the boneless hand, a very apt illustration. (Chopin nocturnes form excellent studies in this for more advanced players). It is an indescribable combination of suppleness and pressure, and can be best acquired, if not inborn, by listening and watching people who have an avowedly good touch, after the teacher's directions have been as far as possible carried out. The combination of cantabile and accompaniment in one and the same or different hands, is well studied in Bach fugues, song arrangements, and sonatas; a well-known example not included among these will come to your mind in the F sharp Romance of Schumann. These varieties in touch are of the same quality as in painting varieties of colour; the dreariness of a colourless performance is perhaps even more striking than that of an uninteresting painting, partly probably to the fact that music is expected to appeal more to the gift of fantasy and romance.

Bach has been called the musician's staff of life, in fact, he has written music for nearly every instrument, which,

when mastered completely, leaves one ready to conquer easily any future difficulty. Bach requires in a marked degree all the qualities for a fine performance of any music. Let me recall them and show you how I interpret this:—Soul, touch, facility, accuracy.

Many people, particularly beginners, call Bach *dull*; this is partly because so few people can really play him; it is only those with great souls who can, and that is why he is so often misrepresented and misinterpreted. The touch required is so various that years of patient study and will power and concentration only arrive at the desired effect.

Facility and accuracy are developed marvellously by an intelligent study of the great master, because he, firstly, requires great command over fingering and great independence of hands, and secondly, a very broad idea of phrasing.

Now phrasing in all branches of music bears the same relation to musical performance that correct accentuation and punctuation bear to speaking or reading aloud. In fact, phrasing quite apart from soul is the thing of all others which renders music performed *intelligible* to the audience.

The early stages of phrasing are almost entirely imitative in character, the pupil is shown where to lay the stress and where to shade off; and this shows how important it is to hear only a perfect performance. For the time being we are calling on the development of the faculty of imitation; this, therefore, becomes more sharpened, and therefore more ready to imitate anything heard. Nothing but perfection should therefore ever be heard by the learner, as it is a curious fact that mistakes of any kind when once made are generally very capricious in their reappearance, and may recur when the piece is apparently quite finished.

If the pupil is not to be the mere slavish imitator of his master, but one in whose performance the voice of originality shall be heard, he can be helped greatly towards intelligent phrasing by a study, if only a slight one, of several items. I take it for granted that by this time he thoroughly understands the signs employed by all modern composers of the way in which they wish their compositions performed. This multitude in the signs has, I think, partly cramped the field for originality. In old music, even when printed, generally only the

notes were given, sometimes only a figured bass, the performer had therefore to make a very minute study of the composer's intentions before an adequate performance was possible. Nowadays the means are so abundant by which a composer may express his meaning, even to the smallest detail of correct phrasing, that although the student is required to possess a more extensive knowledge of musical notation and its meaning, he is not of necessity always so cultivated a person musically. As well as this knowledge of signs towards correct phrasing, a knowledge of musical form and some harmony are absolutely necessary to make the student an intelligent and independent performer. These lessons in form should always accompany the commencement of a new piece to be studied, and the pupil should also be requested to examine and discourse about the form of similar compositions he has not yet learned.

Although "all men are born to die" and few to play the piano, it need not discourage the less able from striving towards the highest ideals. For the higher our ideal the higher we shall reach in our efforts, only we must continually keep before our minds the Hebrew proverb, "He that neglects small things shall fail by little and little."

The time allotted me for talking to you to-day is nearly at an end, and in fact there is only little more for me to add and that little is on so subtle and evanescent a subject that only very little can be said—namely, the subject of soul; it is practically a province outside the teacher's range. But it can be fostered and assisted if even the smallest germ is present. We are passing from the realm of fixed rules to that of pure imagination. We must develop that imagination, the originality and creative powers of the pupil at his musical studies, but quite apart from them they can be in some senses developed away from the music lesson. Those who live in harmonious and beautiful surroundings, in whom the daily intercourse with their fellow-creatures calls out the highest and noblest of the human character, will, when it comes to interpretation at any art whatever and more particularly in the musical art which speaks a language so infinitely more ephemeral than any other, be able to touch the heart and soul of his listeners. The musical food for this is of course the works of the greatest composers, and the constant listening

to their performance by great players. This study calls into play much more than the will power and intelligence; it addresses itself to that part of the human intelligence which is the most deep, the most refined, the most sensitive. To arrive here, there are many rungs in the ladder of progress and it is only a conscientious and serious worker who ever arrives anywhere near the goal. But all thought and sentiment, all natural aptitude and the artistic afflatus, are as though imprisoned if the fingers are not broken into their work, and are not capable of triumphing without effort over the mechanical difficulties of playing. Without the technical element, there can be no interpretation; development in this direction is then, as I have shown above, of primary importance. This is the road, made more straightforward I trust by the hints and experience of those who have already trodden it, towards *musical liberty*. The future joy of the performer depends on the skill of his hand and the school in which he is musically educated. Hesitation and finger clumsiness destroy all the fascination and spell of the performance. Sureness and skill on the other hand enable attempting of all, and success in all. They open the door to fantasy and all its brilliant following and lead the player to the enchanted kingdom of the ideal. For the development of expression (one of the adjuncts of soul in playing), the performer must try to conjure up the feelings which inspired the composer, must try to come under the empire of his mind and to add to it the depth of his own emotions.

That gift, so intuitive and elastic, which can assimilate the ideas of others, is very susceptible to development, but it cannot be given to him who has no suspicion of it in his nature.

Expression does not obey fixed laws. It depends on the touch and is measured by the temperament and character, the natural gifts, the education, and the surrounding in which the pianist lives. It is the *reflection* of soul, and *technique* is the mirror in which it is reflected.

It must not be thought that it is sufficient to play with soul and neglect form. It is just as important on the contrary to obtain perfection in execution and style. The gifts of the player who can only interpret can never replace the talent

of the executant; artistic beauty of performance must be coupled with exalted thoughts and feelings.

The greater the clearness of execution, the greater is the expression of feeling, and the better is emotion conveyed. We cannot analyse feelings as we can words, but we require that they should be as sincerely given musically as they are felt.

Expression is the immediate result of touch, and touch depends on sentiment; it receives its various expressions, and points them out by means of varieties of sound, in other words, by means of colour. Isolated sound has no real meaning, but it can express everything when it reflects the life of the soul. A pianist attracts or repels us by his touch and by the colour he calls from his instrument. In interpretation, as in all other things, the pupil must begin with the easy, and learn first pieces which are not beyond his intellectual faculties any more than those which are beyond his technical development. Progress up to the very end depends on this. For the simplest as well as for the most difficult composition faultless execution must be united with truthful interpretation.

A child who does not even understand himself cannot express feelings which he hardly knows. It is the teacher's duty to take the initiative, to awaken feeling and to impress ideas still lacking, and to kindle in his pupil the inspiration of the composer. This is one of the reasons why the works of the great masters should be exclusively studied. Most of them have spoken down to the level of the child. One line from a great master often contains far more charm and poetry than pages from the pen of an inferior musician.

Nothing is more delightful than the smile of satisfaction which brightens a child's face, when he has grasped the character of a piece and can play it perfectly. The expression which is thus suggested to the child must in the beginning, like phrasing, be imitated by him more or less timidly; after a time it manifests itself spontaneously in a more or less personal manner. Gradually he learns the secret of expression, and ends by going to look for it by himself.

The moral development of the pupil acts most directly and powerfully on his interpretation. The progress of his intellectual faculties and the strengthening of his natural

qualities are quickly reflected in his playing, and vary according to the degree of intensity with which he can enter into the feelings of others; he becomes more and more sensitive to these as he recognises his own.

Unfortunately the art of piano playing has often been the pretext for shining in society and for achieving success (I say has been, as I believe that the more serious way life is looked upon nowadays has diminished this tendency), this probably has been one of the causes why showy pieces and piano gymnastics, as they might be called, have usurped the place of and created a distaste for works of a more serious nature, but whose composition is imbued with thought and feeling. The study of a composition without a worthy idea has often created quite naturally the executant without soul, as well as a whole host of people one can only designate as automatons, acrobats, and those who by the extravagant idiosyncrasies of gesture, mannerism and sentimentality hope to hide their utter want of truth and knowledge. It is in the works of the world's great masters that we must seek our training, all is sincere and beautiful there. They are types of work, patience and knowledge, models of beauty and originality. Composition, one form of creation, may be considered the highest ideal of the musician, but let me add *real* interpretation is *creation* also. Forty centuries ago a Chinese Emperor felt the truth of musical beauty when he said, "Music is the expression of the feelings of the soul. If the musician's soul be virtuous, his music will be so celestial that it will put men in touch with the spirits of heaven."